

County Planner Studying Up on Wetlands Issues

23 May 1990

Although protecting wetlands is not in county jurisdiction, the laws directly effect construction and development that encroaches on wetlands. Therefore, Wasatch County Planner Bob Mathis is trying to learn all he can about the subject.

He said he took on the self-educating project a few years ago when a couple had to answer to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for excavating to install a drain pipe across a wetlands in Midway. They were discovered as a result of a complaint that the Homestead Resort had drained a wetland in order to install its golf course.

Mathis has also learned that the corps will work with individual building permits. But he cited a couple of specific cases that demonstrated it is more complicated and costly to tamper with wetlands and get caught later than to work with the corps from the beginning.

Therefore, Mathis's motive in learning about wetlands is so that he can inform people about the problems of building in wetlands before they invest in any projects that would have to be corrected later, possibly at great expense.

"My concern is that people are

The law protecting wetlands was enacted in 1972. It was strengthened when Pres. George Bush signed an executive order, two years ago, directing all federal agencies to consider the impact of every federal project on wetlands. The order was to withhold federal money from funding any project that resulted in a net loss of wetlands.

Mathis said the importance of wetlands is not limited to wildlife that directly needs wetlands in order to survive.

He said Utah is the second most arid state in the nation and "the rarest and most important wildlife habitat in the state is known as riparian habitat." He explained that is soil that is saturated with water that doesn't come from the ocean.

Utah's wetlands are "the nursery for the basis of the food chain for most kinds of wildlife. The predators that don't live in the wetlands eat animals that, at one point in their lives, live in the wetlands, either feeding on the wetlands or feeding on the smaller animals that grown out of the nutrients in the wetlands."

He also said filtering water through the natural growth in wet-

landowners will meet next week to discuss the plan.

Mathis further explained that if the sprinkling system is installed, it will not be allowed to destroy wetlands. He said he wouldn't know specifically how the system could effect wetlands until the project is studied. But one possibility is that it could make it easier for farmers to drain wetlands and turn them into upland fields.

Under the Swamp Busters Act, there are special procedures for dealing with irrigation-induced wetlands, that are wetlands only because they are irrigated.

"As far as the Army Corps of Engineers is concerned, any wetlands vegetation is a wetland," said Mathis. "But they may allow special changes to take place, because it is not part of a natural wetland."

He said the federal people he had worked with were not hard to work with or unreasonable in their approach, although he had been told

his experience was the exception rather than the rule.

A representative of the Corps of Engineers will be addressing the Wasatch County Board of Realtors in June and Mathis has asked that he and the zoning administrators from the cities in the county be allowed to attend.

"All of these people have areas within their jurisdiction that could be protected. Even though none of us have any authority in this new area, it is important that we understand what the attitude is of the people that do, so that we don't issue permits ignorantly," he said.

Even so, he said it would be possible for a zoning administrator to miss a wetland location. He made it clear that he does not want to infer that he knows how to identify wetlands or will call in the corps to assist with building permits.

"I just want to understand it better," he said.

on back



Dear Editor: Re: Aug. 1 article: After returning from vacation yesterday, I had an opportunity to read an Aug. 1 article entitled "Trail Promoters May Want Wasatch To Sacrifice Heber Creeper For Trail System." The article gave the impression that the Utah Division of Parks and Recreation was advocating doing away with The Heber Creeper and replacing it with a multi-use trail. This is definitely not the case.

My purpose in meeting with the County Commissioners was simply to inform them of upcoming opportunities for multi-use recreational trails. It may be possible, in the next few years, to connect several trail projects together. This could form a continuous trail from Provo, through Wasatch and Summit Counties, with loops into Salt Lake City and Park City. In the future perhaps extending into Ogden.

The Division of Parks and Recreation, and many others feel that the development of this continuous trail system would have a positive impact locally and statewide recreationally as well as economically.

My intention in attending the Commission Meeting was to be informative, an advocate for a public recreational trail coordinator through Provo Canyon to Deer Creek, and to ask the Commission to provide their input to the plan-

ning processes associated with the various trail projects. 8-22-90

John Knudson
Comprehensive Planner

from front

aware that there is an increased concern about wetlands protection and that there is help available through the appropriate federal agencies, and that they should be cautious," said Mathis.

He said he has met with a representative of the corps twice during the past month, and was not surprised by anything he learned. "But it made me want to make sure that my work in issuing [building] permits considers the impacts on wetlands, and that's where I felt I didn't know enough."

He said when he thinks someone's plans may infringe on wetlands, he may also refer them to the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), which does not regulate wetlands in the same way as the corps, but can offer expertise on the law.

lands is the most effective way of removing contaminants, although making it disease free is a separate problem. He cited experiments in which raw human sewage had been deliberately dumped on wetlands and was effectively "cleaned up."

He said it is his understanding that wetlands can be used for agriculture, like grazing. However, they must not be drained or altered in any way, except as specifically permitted by the corps.

A new law, called The Swamp Busters Act, can directly effect the irrigation sprinkling system for the Heber Valley that the county is trying to get funded as part of the Jordanelle Dam Project, as well as the Provo River Parkway that is already part of the project.

The SCS wants to work with the Provo River landowners to limit recreational use along the river as part of a large management plan in order to protect both wildlife and water quality. The SCS and the

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